

Fact or Fiction?



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“Environmentally Caused” Does Not Mean Caused by Industry

What do you think of when you hear the term “environmentally caused cancer?” In this day and age, many folks think of polluted air and water and bad chemicals as the culprits. In her book, *Toxic Terror*, Elizabeth Whelan says that the phrase “80-90 percent of cancer is caused by the environment,” has led people to believe that most cancers that occur in the U.S. are environmentally caused, and thus preventable. She notes: “The implication is that the ‘environment’ refers to a virtual army of cancer-causing chemicals in our air, food, water and workplace. The message is particularly self-serving in government reports because it lends support to the idea that we need more regulations and regulators to deal with all those hazardous chemicals.”¹

Different Meanings

The word “environment” has two very different meanings. John Higginson, the first director of the World Health Organization’s International Agency for Research on Cancer, is credited with first saying that the environment caused upwards of 90 percent of all cancers. He used ‘environment’ to include everything with which people come in contact. Here is Higginson’s definition of environment. “When I used the term *environment* in those days (1950s), I was considering the total environment, cultural as well as chemical. Environment is what surrounds people and impinges on them. The air you breathe, the culture you live in, the agricultural habits of your community, the social cultural habits, the social pressures, the physical chemicals with which you come in contact, the diet, and so on. A lot of confusion has arisen in later days because most people have not gone back to the early literature, but have used the word environment purely to mean chemicals.”²

Higginson also said that he suspected the ecological movement found the

Proportions of Cancer Deaths Attributed to Different Risk Factors^a

	Best Estimate %	Range of Acceptable Estimate %
Tobacco	30	25-40
Alcohol	3	2-4
Diet	35	10-70
Food additives	<1	-5 ^b -2
Reproductive and sexual behaviors	7	1-13
Occupation	4	2-8
Pollution	2-	<1-5
Medicines and medical products	1	0.5-3
Industrial products	<1	<1-2
Geophysical factors	3	2-4
Infections	10?	1-?
Unknown	?	?

a. Richard Doll and Richard Peto, *The Causes of Cancer*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1981), 1256

b. Allowing for a possibly protective effect of antioxidants and other preservatives.

extreme view to be convenient because of the fear of cancer. “If they could possibly make people believe that cancer was going to result from pollution, this would enable them to facilitate the cleanup of water, of the air, or whatever it was.” He added, “I believe that over-emphasis on chemical carcinogens has distorted our approach to the environmental theory for many cancers.”²

All of this was exacerbated by Joseph Califano, the U.S. Secretary of Labor in 1978.³ Edward Wilson and Edmund Crouch report that Califano, in a major *gaffe*, stated that between 15 and 40 percent of all cancers were occupationally related.⁴

Wilson and Crouch state: “This was based upon a report³, never published and usually discreetly forgotten (but alas never

formally repudiated), with appallingly bad arithmetic.” In spite of the bad data in this report, and the fact that it was quickly shown to be in serious error, the report was used by politicians two years after it was scientifically discredited.⁴

Risk Factors

In 1981 Richard Doll and Richard Peto placed numbers and percentages on 12 categories of risk factors.⁵ The accompanying table shows their list. Tobacco and diet far out-distance everything else. In 1996, researchers at Harvard University’s School of Public Health provided an update of the Doll and Peto work. This updated list looked quite similar to Doll and Peto’s.⁶

Summary

Melvin Benarde sums it up very well in his new book *You've Been Had*. "If better health for all were in fact the nation's goal, the first priority would be modification of our self-destructive behavior. The public, however, is not concerned with the self. Why? It has been led to believe that a soup of synthetic chemicals has been loosed upon them by an uncaring military-industrial complex, and that this chemical fouling of the environment is responsible for what is perceived as our generally poor state of health. The environment, as commonly understood, does require vigilance, but for reasons other than human health. Consequently, we are flailing at windmills that pose minuscule risk and consume our energy, our time, and our taxes, whereas the major risks, the real killers, languish for lack of individual and institutional concern, support, and self-control." If you don't want to change your behavior pattern, take the easy way out—blame pollution, industry, and chemicals.

References

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2. Thomas H. Maugh II, "Cancer and Environment: Higginson Speaks Out," *Science*, **205**, 1363 (September 28, 1979).
3. Joseph A. Califano, Jr., "Draft summary: estimates of the fraction of cancer incidence in the United States attributable to occupational factors," with eight contributors but no authors. Presented to AFL-CIO, September 11, 1978.
4. Richard Wilson and Edmund A. C. Crouch, *Risk-Benefit Analysis*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2001), 129.
5. Richard Doll and Richard Peto, *The Causes of Cancer*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1981), 1256.
6. Melvin A. Benarde, *You've Been Had!*, New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 2002), 23.
7. Melvin A. Benarde, *You've Been Had!*, 26.

Advice & Counsel

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- All of you who donated to the MP&M Fund. Your money was spent very wisely.
- All of you who wrote and submitted comments on the proposed regulations.
- All of you who took the time to go to one or more public hearings and provide information about the impact of this regulation on your company.
- The Executive Directors and Boards of AESF, NAMF and MFSA for approving the use of funds and recruiting donations for the effort.
- The AESF Branches that held raffles and meetings designed to raise funds for MP&M—notably Milwaukee, Chicago, Orange County, Grand Rapids, and Boston.
- Christian Richter and Jeff Hannapel of The Policy Group for spearheading the entire effort and pounding on EPA and legislators' doors on a frequent basis.
- Jack Wagner, URS, for spending countless hours going over the database and finding the buried treasures.
- Members of the Government Relations Board of AESF/NAMF/MFSA (Richard Leopold, John Lindstedt, Bill Saas, B.J. Mason, Bob McBride, Bill Wiggins, Bob Sica, David Marsh, J. Kelly Mowry) for finding the right people to fight the battle and spending the collected funds in a most efficient manner. A number of members spent an enormous amount of hours in meetings with EPA representatives.

A number of companies opened their doors and submitted themselves to being sampled by EPA and by outsiders to gather data that eventually refuted EPA's positions:

- Artistic Plating, Milwaukee WI, John Lindstedt
- Able Electropolishing, Chicago IL, Tom Schewe
- Alcaro & Alcaro Plating, Montclair, NJ, Tony Alcaro
- CAPSCO, Inc., Greenville, SC, Sammy Huffman
- Craftsman Plating and Tinning Corp., Chicago, IL, Jim Blacklidge
- C. J. Saporito, Chicago, IL, Bill Kern
- Castle Metal Finishing, Chicago, IL, Phil Meier
- Finishing & Plating Services, Kenosha, WI, Bruce Laken
- Gatto Industrial Platers, Chicago, IL, George Gatto
- Hi-Temp, Chicago, IL, Bill Suzuki
- Northwestern Plating Works, Chicago, IL, David Jacobs and Jim Jacobs

- P&H Plating, Chicago, IL, Jeff Pytlarz
- Perfection Plating, Inc., Chicago, IL, Lou Belmonte
- Precision Plating Co., Chicago, IL, Jim Belmonte & Becky Bennet
- Reliable Plating, Chicago, IL, Jim Greenwell
- SWD Inc., Addison, IL, Mr. Dick Delawder
- Sterling Labs, Harwood Heights, IL, Herb DeGrenier
- Taskem, Inc., Cleveland, OH, Mark Andrus
- Three J's Industries, Inc., Chicago, IL, Joanne Marozza
- Western Rust Proof, Chicago, IL, Bob Paulsen
- Members of my own staff, who read a lot of "mumbo jumbo" and helped me translate it into English, including Jeff Zak, Joelle Zak, and Dan Bell.
- EPA officials who listened to our side and did not turn away from the facts, especially: Sheila Frace, David Ferguson, Christie Whitman, Tracey Mehan, Tom Gibson, Geoff Grubbs, Alex Cristofaro, Marv Rubin and Mindy Gampel.

May the future be a little brighter for all of us because of your efforts. *P&SF*

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